

A Summary of the Constitution of the United States

Preamble

Reasons for the Constitution: The people of the United States made this Constitution and put it into practice for the following reasons:

1. To have a better government than under the Articles of Confederation
2. To give everyone fair treatment
3. To keep peace within the country
4. To defend the country from enemies
5. To live comfortably and well
6. To keep people free both now and in the future.

Article 1

Legislative Branch

Description (Section 1): The legislative branch of government, or Congress, makes all the laws. It has two parts, or houses, the Senate and the House of Representatives.

House of Representatives (Section 2): Members of the House of Representatives serve a 2-year term. They are elected by the people. Representatives must be at least 25 years old, citizens of the United States for at least 7 years, and the citizens of the state they represent.

The number of representatives from each state depends on that state's population. In order to decide on the number of representatives from each state, the government must count the people every 10 years. This is called a census.

The Senate (Section 3): The Senate is made up of two senators from each state. Senators have a 6-year term. Senators must be at least 30 years old, citizens of the United States for at least 9 years, and citizens of the state they represent.

The Vice President of the United States is in charge of the Senate, but may only vote in case of a tie.

Rules (Sections 4-7): Instructions on how to operate both the House and the Senate are covered. Behavior of members, record keeping, pay, and how a bill becomes a law are noted.

Duties (Sections 8-10): The exact duties of Congress are listed. Congress makes all money and trade laws. Congress decides how people can become citizens of the United States and can declare war if necessary. Powers Congress and the states do not have are also listed.



The United States Capitol

Article II

Executive Branch

Description (Section 1): The executive branch is made up of the President of the United States and those who help carry out laws passed by Congress. The President manages the government. A President must have been born in the United States, must be at least 35 years old, and must have lived in the United States for at least 14 years.

Duties (Sections 2-4): Some of the President's jobs include carrying out the laws made by Congress, responsibility for all the armed forces, pardoning crimes, and reporting to Congress at least once a year on what the nation is doing. The President makes treaties and appoints government leaders; the Senate must give its approval.

If the President does wrong, he may be removed from office.



The White House

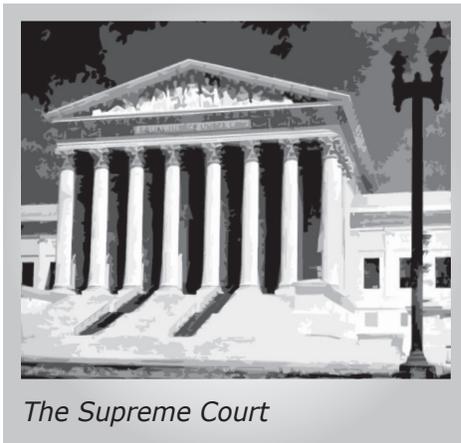
Article III

Judicial Branch

Description (Section 1): The judicial branch of government is the federal court system. The Supreme Court is the nation's highest court. It has the final say in all matters of law. Judges are appointed, not elected to office.

Duties (Section 2): The federal courts have a say in all cases that are not entirely within a state.

Treason (Section 3): The crime of treason, trying to overthrow the government, is explained.



The Supreme Court

Article IV

The States

Rules about the states (Sections 1-4): All states must accept acts, records and laws of other states. A citizen of one state must be given the same rights as the citizens of another state he or she may be in. The governor of one state may send an accused criminal from another state back to that state for trial.

New states may be added to the United States. The United States government will protect all states from enemies.

Article V

Amendments

Making changes: The Constitution may be amended, or changed.

Article VI

Highest Law

Above all others: The Constitution of the United States is the highest law in the land. State laws must be under this law. All national and state lawmakers and officers must support the Constitution.

Article VII

Passing the Constitution

Ratification: This Constitution becomes law when 9 of the 13 states ratify it, or approve it.

Amendments

Amendment I: Congress may not make rules to change freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, or the right of people to come together in a peaceful way or to end petitions to their government.

Amendment II: The people have the right to keep and bear arms.

Amendment III: During peacetime, the government cannot make citizens keep soldiers in their homes.

Amendment IV: People or their homes may not be searched unreasonably.

Amendment V: Persons accused of serious crimes have the right to a jury trial. They may not be forced to give evidence against themselves. Their lives, freedom and property may not be taken from them unfairly. If the government takes a person's property for public use, it must pay the owner for it.

Amendment VI: Persons accused of serious crimes have the right to a speedy and public trial. They must be told of the charges against them. They have the right to legal representation. They have the right to see and question those who accuse them.

Amendment VII: In most cases, there must be a right to a jury trial.

Amendment VIII: It is illegal to require excessive bail, impose excessive fines, and inflict cruel and unusual punishment to others.

Amendments IX and X: If the Constitution does not give a certain right to the United States government, and also does not forbid a state government to have that right, the states and the people have it.

Amendment XI: The power of the judicial branch is limited to certain kinds of cases.

Amendment XII: Electors vote for President and Vice President separately.

Amendment XIII: Slavery may not exist in the United States.

Amendment XIV: People born in the United States or naturalized here are United State citizens. They are also citizens of the state in which they live. States may not make laws that limit the rights of citizens of the United States. They may not take away a person's life or freedom of property unfairly. They must treat all people equally under the law.

The United States Constitution

- Amendment XV:** No citizen may be denied the right to vote because of race.
- Amendment XVI:** Congress has the power to collect taxes.
- Amendment XVII:** United States Senators are elected by the people.
- Amendment XVIII:** Liquor may no longer be manufactured or sold in the United States.
- Amendment XIX:** No citizen may be denied the right to vote because of sex.
- Amendment XX:** Presidents start their new term on January 20; Congress starts its new term on January 3.
- Amendment XXI:** The Eighteenth Amendment to this Constitution is repealed, or taken back.
- Amendment XXII:** Presidents are limited to two terms in office.
- Amendment XXIII:** Residents of Washington, D.C., have the right to vote for President.
- Amendment XXIV:** Citizens need not pay a tax in order to vote for President, Senators or members of Congress.
- Amendment XXV:** In case the President becomes too ill to carry on the job, the Vice President will take over as Acting President until the President is well.
- Amendment XXVI:** No citizen who is 18 years of age or older may be denied the right to vote because of age.
- Amendment XXVII:** If Senators and Representatives vote to increase or decrease their pay, the change in their pay cannot take effect until a federal election has taken place.

United States Constitutional Amendments Regarding the Right to Vote

<i>Amendment</i>	<i>Year Passed</i>	<i>Reason Right to Vote May Not Be Denied</i>
XV	1870	"race, color, or previous condition of servitude"
XIX	1920	"on account of sex"
XXIV	1964	"failure to pay any poll tax or other tax"
XXVI	1971	"any citizen 18 years of age or older"

